



Boa Snake

The following (assuming you have intelligently made the decision to purchase a Boa constrictor) are basic guidelines for proper care and maintenance of your new pet. Red Tailed Boas (or Boa constrictor constrictor, *B. c. imperator*, and a few others) range from Colombia, Mexico, Central America, and others. It should be noted that "Red Tailed Boa" is a trade name interchanged with just about all the ssp. The true Colombian Red Tailed Boas tend to be rare, and it is speculated by some that the name Red Tailed Boa was coined for its appeal over the constrictor name and the negative image it may imply.

SIZE

I have seen neonates ranging from 12 to 24 inches. Growth in newborns is very rapid, between 3-5 feet in one year. The second year can yield lengths of 4 to 7 feet. Adults range anywhere from 5 to 10 feet, with an occasional 12 and 15 footer thrown in just to keep us all on our toes. Growth is directly related to diet and housing conditions. However, unlike fish, a reptile WILL outgrow it's surroundings. Keeping a Boa in a 20 gallon tank WILL NOT keep it from growing. Diet can be used to control growth, but I do not recommend it. If you can't take the size, get a smaller animal! Feed that puppy and let it grow!

FEEDING

Newborns should be fed every 5 days. Start on pinkies, and work up from there. As the snake increases in size, feeding can be cut back to every seven to ten days. Feeding can be done every 2 weeks, or even less in emergency situations, but this is not recommended. Your pet will be much healthier if fed a reasonable meal weekly than if gorged every two weeks. Prey items should be approximately the same diameter as the snake (both at the widest part of the body). ALL prey should be killed or at least stunned. This can be accomplished by several methods. If feeding live, I simply swing the rat by the tail and allow its head to "bump" into a step in my garage. Frozen prey is attractive due to the fact that it is on hand when needed, already dead, and usually cheaper than live. Always kill or stun prey, the worst I have ever felt was when I got in a hurry and fed a live rat. He managed to get his teeth on (but thank goodness not in) Sinbad's back. No damage, just a very worried father. Rats can be hit in the head with a solid object (just stay behind the eyes, very messy if you don't, blood everywhere!) or place a stick behind the head, and pull on the tail to break the neck. Regular use of a vitamin supplement is a must. Your breeder/ supplier/ vet should be able to recommend something suitable. For those of you with larger collections, bulk supplements from a farm supply store work well. It may cost more than a small bottle at the pet store, but tends to last much longer.

Check with a vet as to dosage. Some specimens may regurgitate if handled within a day or two after feeding. I usually avoid handling until the "lump" goes away.

HOUSING

Space, Space, space.

A small tank for starters is OK. I recommend a 20 Long tank minimum. This will be outgrown very quickly (will last about a year)! A cage amounting to 3/4 square foot per foot of snake is what I consider perfect. Shelves can and should be used to increase floor space and allow somewhere to "go" when active. A shelf also allows a warmer basking site, while forming a cooler area underneath.
Temp, Temp, Temp.

TEMPERATURE

for a Boa should be kept around 85°F daytime and 80°F at night. A basking site in the range of 90-95°F is also needed. If temperatures are allowed to stay too cool, refusal of food, regurgitation of food, digestive problems and respiratory infections will be right behind! Heat should be from heating pads, pig blankets, light bulbs, and NEVER EVER EVER from hot rocks. I have even had success using small ceramic space heaters. The heater should have small enough openings that tails can't enter, an adjustable and covered thermostat, and should shut off if tipped over. These radiate plenty of heat, but do not develop the dangerous surface temps regular space heaters tend to have. Remember to monitor temp very closely. It must also be remembered that the temp at the bottom can be 10-15°F lower than that at the top. Be sure the basking area is placed so that a gradient is achieved, with the cool down area being no lower than 80-85°F.

The cage should contain a hiding place, a sturdy water bowl big enough for soaking, and something to rub on while shedding (Rocks and tree limbs/sticks work well).

SUBSTRATE

Keep it simple, and do not use Cedar or sand. Newspaper is the easiest. However, an active pet will quickly look as though he has been rolling in charcoal! I use blank paper obtained from local newspapers. Many will give this away, but most sell it for a few dollars. Just ask for an end roll. I have also used indoor/outdoor type carpeting. This is attractive, and relatively inexpensive. Keep a few pieces handy, so that one can be replaced and the other cleaned later. However, carpeting will cut down on the amount of heat obtained from under the tank heating systems. Animal bedding is also attractive and easy to clean, just be sure it does not contain cedar. Aspen is best. Simply remove soiled areas daily, and replace all when cleaning tank.

LIGHTNING

For heat OK. Full Spectrum If you really think you must. Not really necessary for a well kept Red Tailed Boa.